

Nehemiah Initiative Seattle

Building Beloved Community

20 September 2021

Council President Lorena González
Seattle City Council
Seattle City Hall
600 5th Avenue – 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Passage of CB 120157: An ordinance relating to affordable housing on properties owned or controlled by religious organizations; modifying affordability requirements adopted in Ordinance 126384; and amending Section 23.42.055 of the Seattle Municipal Code and Section 10 of Ordinance 126384.

Dear Council President González and Seattle City Council Members:

I want to thank Mayor Durkan, Council Members Dan Strauss and Teresa Mosqueda and Council President Lorena González for their courageous and committed effort to introduce this bill for your vote today. It gives us all a tool to enable our Black churches the support and incentive they need to develop their underutilized properties for affordable housing in a financially feasible manner. For the last two months, the Nehemiah Initiative Seattle and its member Black churches have sought an equitable solution to the ill-advisedly 60% AMI amendment to Council Bill 120081 that was passed into Seattle City Ordinance 126384 in July of 2021.

The Nehemiah Initiative was created around two objectives: 1) to develop affordable housing on the underused property of historically Black churches and 2) to have those churches benefit from the residual revenue of the developments to keep them financially strong – so they can be well while they do good. In the midst of rapid gentrification of their Seattle neighborhoods Seattle has lost an estimated 12 Black churches in the past 10 years due to the ever-present threat of displacement from gentrification.

The Nehemiah Initiative and our supporters from the Church Council of Greater Seattle, the American Institute of Architects Seattle Chapter, the Housing Development Consortium, and the Coalition for More Housing Choices advocated for the passage of CB 120081 at the 80% AMI affordability level recommended by the Washington State Legislature. We support organizations that produce very low and low-income housing at the 60% AMI level and feel the passage of CB 120157 in no way prevents them from doing that good work.

However, we are aware that our churches cannot cover the costs of 60% AMI developments without heavy subsidy. Modest Black churches and small BIPOC-led development firms simply cannot build to this level of affordability. The Black community is not monolithic, we have a greater range of income and need in our income groups, including the moderate-income working class, and a 60% AMI limit does not serve our objective of getting more of our people above the low-income level and from limits that keep Black people perpetually poor.

As a gesture of racial equity and advancement, I urge you to vote yes on the passage of CB 120157. Thank you.

126 15th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98122
www.nehemiahinitiativeseattle.org

Nehemiah Initiative Seattle

Building Beloved Community

Yours in the Struggle,



Donald I King, FAIA
President/CEO

Copy: Honorable Jenny Durkan, Mayor of Seattle
American Institute of Architects Seattle Chapter
Church Council of Greater Seattle
Coalition for More Housing Choices
Housing Development Consortium
The Algonquin Group
United Black Christian Clergy of Washington

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